

a sign he fully respects civilian control of the military.

Finally, our country faces several threats that President Biden's administration must address immediately. General Austin's intimate knowledge of our military will allow him to hit the ground running at the Department and make wise investments that deter global aggressors.

I especially welcome General Austin's pledge to support our country's pandemic response efforts, such as helping with the distribution of vaccines nationwide. Through his leadership, the military can provide much needed medical and logistical support to counter the COVID pandemic.

We are facing an unprecedented set of national security challenges, both at home and overseas. I have full confidence in General Austin's ability to help us overcome these challenges, and I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of his confirmation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, it is my understanding that Chairman INHOFE is in route to provide his comments, and I just want to begin by thanking him for his tremendous leadership. Without his dedication to a bipartisan, thoughtful process, we would not be here today, and it is the hallmark of his leadership throughout the years we have worked together. I anticipate his arrival.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Duly noted.

Mr. REED. In order to expedite the vote, I will proceed.

Mr. President, I rise to express my support for the confirmation of Lloyd Austin to be the Secretary of Defense of the United States.

General Austin is an exceptionally qualified leader with a long and distinguished career in the U.S. military. He has served at the highest echelons of the Army and capped his service as the commander of U.S. Central Command. His character and integrity are unquestioned, and he possesses the knowledge and skills to effectively lead the Pentagon.

The United States faces many complex security threats. If confirmed as Secretary of Defense, General Austin will lead the Department during a time when U.S. strategic priorities have shifted to focus increasingly on near-peer competition with China and Russia. The Department must also transform how it operates with an increased focus on critical technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and cyber security, while also emphasizing rapid delivery of advanced new weapons systems on timelines that keep pace with technological change.

In addition, President Biden must address the urgent and dire challenges that few of us would have anticipated 4 years ago. Our country is in the midst of a pandemic that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and infected

millions more and resulted in billions in economic damage, and the virus is still not under control. Recently, it was revealed that large segments of the Federal Government and major companies were hacked by Russia. We are still trying to ascertain the extent of the breach, but it could be the most significant cyber intrusion in the history of our country or perhaps the world. This event, too, should prompt us to move promptly to fill Cabinet positions that are critical to our national security.

Unfortunately, the Department of Defense is adrift and in desperate need of steadfast leadership. Over the course of the past 4 years, there has been repeated turnover at senior levels of the Department and a concerted effort to purposefully leave multiple civilian offices unfilled, necessitating the installment of career or midlevel officials into positions in an acting capacity.

Unlike other nominees for Cabinet positions, Congress must provide, as Senator MCCONNELL indicated, an exception for General Austin to serve as Secretary of Defense. Under the current statute, individuals are prohibited from appointment if they are within 7 years of military service. Congress found itself in a similar situation 4 years ago when President Trump nominated Gen. James Mattis to be the Secretary of Defense.

Prior to General Austin's confirmation hearing, the Senate Armed Services Committee held a hearing on civilian control of the Armed Forces that focused on the erosion of civil-military relations. At the hearing, valid concerns were raised about providing another waiver so soon after Secretary Mattis. However, at his nomination hearing earlier this week, General Austin pledged his commitment to repairing civil-military relations while also empowering civilian personnel within the Department of Defense. These are critical commitments by General Austin and ones that I support.

Therefore, yesterday I voted in favor of the legislation to provide General Austin with an exception to serve as Secretary of Defense, and I was pleased the legislation received strong bipartisan support.

General Austin is an outstanding choice to serve as Secretary of Defense. I am proud to support his nomination, given the unique challenges we face. I think from now on, in a few moments, we can refer to him as Secretary Austin, which is the appropriate title for his role.

With that, I yield the floor to my colleague, the chairman.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, yesterday I had the opportunity to respond to the majority on my support for Tony Blinken to be the Secretary of State. He is someone I have known for a long period of time. I think we will see that with the new administration here and myself being a conservative Repub-

lican, there will be some appointments that I will not really be excited about and agree with, in which case I will state it. But in the case of the Secretary of State, I expressed myself yesterday and I want to do it again today for what I consider to be a really critical first appointment—second appointment that the new administration makes, and that would be for General Austin to be the person in charge at a time that is very unique.

I agree with the Senator who just spoke about the qualities of this general. We know that he rose through the ranks through the Army to become the first four-star general and commander of Central Command from 2013 to 2016. He has done everything right.

We, right now—I know the Presiding Officer is aware of this and certainly the ranking member of the committee is aware of this—we are in the most threatening times that we have ever been in. We have China and Russia out there with capabilities that we didn't really believe we would find ourselves with. So that is going to be the primary concern of this new administration, and I can't think of a better person to take the helm than General Austin to provide the leadership.

And it is true that we had to have a waiver yesterday. That waiver was overwhelmingly supported in a bipartisan way. So everyone knows that we gave a lot of thought to it. And this is at a time where we really needed someone with the background of General Austin to take that position, and I strongly support it and look forward to serving with him.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON AUSTIN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Austin nomination?

Mr. INHOFE. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO), the Senator from Mississippi (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 93, nays 2, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 5 Ex.]

YEAS—93

Baldwin	Blackburn	Booker
Barrasso	Blumenthal	Boozman
Bennet	Blunt	Braun

Brown	Hoeven	Romney
Cantwell	Inhofe	Rosen
Cardin	Johnson	Rounds
Carper	Kaine	Rubio
Casey	Kelly	Sanders
Cassidy	Kennedy	Sasse
Collins	King	Schatz
Coons	Klobuchar	Schumer
Cornyn	Lankford	Scott (FL)
Cortez Masto	Leahy	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Lujan	Shaheen
Cramer	Lummis	Shelby
Crapo	Manchin	Sinema
Cruz	Markey	Smith
Daines	Marshall	Stabenow
Duckworth	McConnell	Sullivan
Durbin	Menendez	Tester
Ernst	Merkley	Thune
Feinstein	Murkowski	Toomey
Fischer	Murphy	Tuberville
Gillibrand	Murray	Van Hollen
Graham	Ossoff	Warner
Grassley	Padilla	Warnock
Hagerty	Paul	Warren
Hassan	Peters	Whitehouse
Heinrich	Portman	Wicker
Hickenlooper	Reed	Wyden
Hirono	Risch	Young

NAYS—2

Hawley

Lee

NOT VOTING—5

Burr
CapitoHyde-Smith
Moran
Tillis

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, first, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF JANET LOUISE YELLEN

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, a few minutes ago, Chair Janet Yellen was approved by the Senate Finance Committee to be Secretary of the Treasury by an extraordinary 26-to-0 vote.

I have seen times around here in the Senate where you come away convinced you couldn't get 26 to 0 among Senators to buy a soda. I want to thank Senators GRASSLEY and CRAPO for working very closely with me and Senate Democrats to achieve this remarkable vote this morning.

The fact is, Janet Yellen has been confirmed by this body four times. She really belongs in the Senate confirmation hall of fame, and the reason that she has been confirmed all of these times is because of what we saw at her confirmation hearing on Tuesday. She did a superb job. After the hearing, she responded in a substantive way to hundreds of questions that came from colleagues and has made a real commitment to transparency.

Now, I know that Senators are working on a variety of issues now, but I

would like to say that I think, given the urgency of the economic challenge our country faces, in a truly perilous economic time, I would very much like to work with all of my colleagues, particularly Senators CRAPO and GRASSLEY, to find a way to, today, bring up Chair Yellen for confirmation to be our Secretary of the Treasury.

I want to say I very much appreciate the conciliatory way this was discussed today, and I really hope the Senate can vote on her nomination today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas is recognized.

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at the end of my remarks the Senator from Oklahoma, Senator INHOFE, be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of the remarks from the Senator from Arkansas that I be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHINA

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, on Wednesday, just moments after Joe Biden took office, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs sanctioned 28 members of the outgoing administration, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien, and UN Ambassador Kelly Craft.

According to Chinese State media, these Trump administration officials were guilty of "crazy moves which gravely interfered in China's internal affairs." Those "crazy moves" include presumably condemning the Chinese Communist Party's genocidal campaign against religious minorities in Xinjiang Province or its atheistic crackdown on Chinese Christians. In addition to interfering, these officials allegedly offended the Chinese people and seriously disrupted U.S.-China relations. I guess that refers to some, such as Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar, who traveled to Taiwan.

Under the new sanctions, these officials are now barred from entering China, but more important and more ominous, institutions associated with them are also restricted from doing business with China.

Now, it is tempting to laugh off these sanctions, as I did last summer when China sanctioned me. You know you won't have a second honeymoon in Wuhan or you will have to vacation in a nongenocidal country.

But these sanctions are no laughing matter. They are not bluster. They are another step in China's long-term campaign to coerce Americans at every level of government and business. They are a direct attack on the independence of U.S. policy toward China and an attempt to blackmail the Biden administration with personal financial ruin in

the future if they dare to stand up to the Chinese Communist Party.

Some may start to think about the potential damage to their future, and they may start to sweat a little bit. Now, you may say: Good. I am glad that former government officials can't cash in on their service and go to influence-peddling firms like WestExec or Albright Stonebridge and sell access to the Chinese.

I might even agree with that point, but consider a few other hypotheticals. The Chinese State media singled out book publishers as just one example of who could pay the price. Many public officials like to write memoirs, and these memoirs often add a lot to our understanding of current events, but Chinese State media singled out book publishers as an example of companies that would be banned from China if they associated with sanctioned individuals.

In fact, China has already used American books as pawns in the trade war with the United States. So will major publishing houses really risk losing access to the Chinese market for all their other titles to strike a book deal with, say, a former Biden Cabinet official who was tough on China and ended up getting sanctioned? It is unclear but, I would say, doubtful.

Other public officials practice at big law firms. And I know that we all make jokes about lawyers, but it is an honorable profession. There is nothing wrong with practicing at a big law firm, and they may plan to return to their firms after the administration is over. A lot of those firms have clients with close ties to China. And even if a former public official has no client with any business in China, will those law firms really take back their old employees if it means potentially losing valuable clients who are afraid of angering the Chinese Communist Party? Again, I would say it is unclear but, perhaps, doubtful.

Once you consider these hypotheticals and others that don't involve influence peddling or anything untoward, you can begin to see the insidious consequences of these new sanctions. Beijing wants to scare the Biden administration into doing its bidding, and they want to scare U.S. businesses into blacklisting any official who irritates the Chinese Communist Party.

Therefore, I call on the Biden administration to treat these sanctions as a day-one assault on the independence of its foreign policy by denouncing this intimidation in the strongest possible terms.

But as the Chinese Communist Party is determined to prove, actions speak louder than words, so I also call upon President Biden to act reciprocally by sanctioning Chinese officials who are responsible for this blackmail campaign against his administration.

Those officials shouldn't be able to ferret away their fortunes in the U.S. banking system the way so many corrupt Chinese oligarchs do, nor should